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ABSTRACT

This paper, developed from the discussions of the Executive Session on Making the System Work for Poor Children, describes why the current human service system is failing to help many poor children, and maps out the dimensions of a system that could greatly improve these children's prospects. The argument is made that the current system's problems arise because services are driven by legislative, funding, professional, and bureaucratic requirements rather than by the needs of children and families themselves. The alternative proposed by this report, which takes as its starting point the interwoven needs of children and families, is undergirded by the following five principles: (1) prevention; (2) comprehensiveness; (3) continuity; (4) effective accountability; and (5) enhancing the dignity and authority of families. In addition, the report describes several promising programs that operate with considerable freedom (e.g., the Home Based Guidance program in New York and the Intensive Family Services program in Maryland). Also called for are new and better ways of measuring program effectiveness and of holding administrators and workers accountable. Finally, the report makes the case that communities of differing political persuasions can give vulnerable children ladders into productive adult life. The names and addresses of the participants who developed the report are included. (JB)

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